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ANDREW AUERNHEIMER

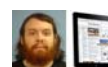
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The Internet's Best Terrible Person Goes to Jail: Can a Reviled Master Troll Become a Geek Hero?

NOV 27, 2012 10:05 AM

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 **Adrian Chen**

On a gray Wednesday morning in October, the car headed west on the Lincoln Highway Bridge hit 100 miles per hour and I started to worry it might hurtle off into the tangle of rusted-out warehouses and smoke stacks that pass for a landscape in northeastern New Jersey. I peeked over the driver's shoulder, watching the speedometer approach the sound barrier. But my companion in the back seat of the Buick, the 27-year-old hacker and internet troll Andrew "Weev" Auernheimer, seemed not to notice as we nearly doubled the speed limit. He slouched and explained to the driver, who had asked him for a cigarette, why he didn't have any.

"I'm a Mormon now," Auernheimer said, as if converting to Mormonism was as natural a thing for a twenty-something to do as getting a tattoo. "I don't buy cigarettes anymore."

"Fuck!" said the driver.

Auernheimer had bigger things to worry about that day. He was running late to the first pre-trial hearing for his federal hacking case, which would start in just 20 minutes in Newark. Auernheimer has spent his life on the margins of cyberspace, a harbinger of online chaos. And his life's work reached an unfortunate culmination last week, when he was **convicted in Newark** of computer crimes for his role in a 2010 breach of AT&T's customer data. He could now be sentenced to up to ten years in federal prison. But even in his final days of freedom, Auernheimer lives a troll's life, accompanied by a background noise of bedlam wherever he goes. And at that moment it was the back seat of the Buick speeding to Newark. As we swerved around an SUV in the passing lane, my large intestine reached out to touch the door handle.

"I just got introduced to some fantastic new designer drug. I'm pretty happy with it," Auernheimer had told me a few days earlier in a Gchat. "I'm on like an hour of sleep a day now. The minutes before trial are precious. Plenty of time to sleep in prison."

I wanted to witness the start of Auernheimer's showdown with justice that day because his legal troubles were sparked in large part by a **Gawker article**. In June of 2010, just days after the release of Apple's original iPad, a computer security group Auernheimer was a part of called Goatse Security discovered that AT&T had accidentally made the email addresses of subscribers to its iPad 3G wireless service publicly accessible. Goatse Security collected more than 100,000

email addresses from an AT&T website using a program called an "account slurper" and Auernheimer contacted then-staff writer Ryan Tate with proof of the breach.

By that time, Auernheimer was already something of an internet celebrity, having become the closest thing to a figurehead for the wide-ranging pursuit of fucking things up on the Internet. He was the star of a blockbuster 2008 *New York Times* magazine profile about internet trolling, the art of provoking online for provocation's sake. "I hack, I ruin lives, I make piles of money," he **boasted** in the *Times*. He's also taken credit for attacks on Livejournal and Amazon, shocked audiences on live Australian television, and served as the president of an internet trolling organization whose very name the government prosecutor in charge of his case would not pronounce. "**Wikipedia me**," reads Auernheimer's **Twitter bio**.

The FBI launched an investigation into Goatse Security and about half a year after the iPad story broke, on Jan. 18, 2011, the feds broke down Auernheimer's door in Fayetteville, Ark.—the town he was born and was living in at the time—and arrested him. He was charged with one count of conspiracy to gain unauthorized access computer and one count of identity theft. A fellow member of Goatse Security, Daniel Spitler, was also arrested.

The AT&T/iPad breach brought a new level of fame for Auernheimer, even as his reputation remained stunted elsewhere. Up until this month's conviction, there had been surprisingly little attention paid to Auernheimer's case. Recently, a parade of young men have been carted off for computer crimes committed in the name of some higher purpose; these so-called hacktivists are often championed by geeks who cherish freedom of information, and the notion that scrawny dudes like themselves can fuck with powerful people using just a keyboard. But there has been no similar outpouring of support or **rallies** in Weev's name. Even after the Gawker story was posted, Auernheimer enjoyed his success in something like solitude: he sat at home with a projector shining a Twitter search for "Goatse" on the wall, tracking the reaction in real-time. Especially delightful were the tweets of the sad sacks who had Googled "Goatse" hoping for information on the iPad hackers everyone was talking about, but who instead got a face full of the **legendary gross-out picture** of the same name, a guy pulling his asshole open. Thousands were Goatse'd that day, Auernheimer recalled with laugh.

For Auernheimer, the AT&T breach was one of his finest works as a troll. He personally didn't hack anything—the program used to collect the email addresses was written by Spitler—except the media. He was the hype man for Goatse, and he claims blew the breach up far beyond its actual significance. "The bug that I'm indicted over isn't a big deal," he says. "What made it big is the way I presented it." He boils down his success at promoting the AT&T job to three bullet points: "Rhetoric, persuasion, and meme reference."

But was collecting the email addresses actually a crime? "If somebody mistakenly puts information out there on the web and somebody mistakenly gets that information, that's not illegal," says Jennifer Granick, a lawyer and the director of the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford. This is why Auernheimer decided to fight his charges instead of take a plea deal, as Spitler did last year.

"I contend there is no crime in telling the truth or using AT&T's, or anybody's, publicly accessible data, to cite it to talk about how they made people's data public," he **told CNET**.

Auernhemier's jury disagreed.

The Lincoln Tunnel Commute of Doom was not supposed to happen. Auernheimer and I had met two hours earlier at the PATH station in Lower Manhattan. From there, we had planned to take the train to Newark together. Auernheimer's short frame was made humpbacked by an over-stuffed corduroy backpack and he'd freshly shaved the big beard that usually makes him look like a prophet or a Communist, depending on the hat he's wearing. He had on a grey suit. "I almost look respectable now," he said. He looked like somebody's intern. We had more than enough time for a leisurely train ride to Newark and to find a place for Auernheimer to grab a gluten-free breakfast near the courthouse.

Auernheimer has been pretty much homeless over the nearly two years since he was arrested, splitting his time between San Francisco and New York and he was cagey about where he'd been staying in advance of the trial. He said that he had spent the previous night at his lawyer's house in Brooklyn, though it was strange that he and his lawyer weren't then making the trip together to Newark. I'm not sure why he would lie about this, but it is important to note, if it hasn't

become clear already, that Auernheimer is not a reliable source. Among the incredible things he has told me about himself: He'd once been detained in Kyrgyzstan for some mysterious crime that he couldn't reveal because he didn't know "if the statute of limitations are up;" that he partied with German intelligence officers at the German consulate in San Francisco earlier this year, and that he'd earned huge amounts of money working for a financial company then quit after some soul-searching. Massive wealth is an old one for him: In 2008, he told the *NYT Magazine* that he was raking it in working for a shadowy hacker group called "the organization," which made \$10 million a year and had allowed him to buy a Rolls Royce Phantom. If this was true, he must have had a fun few years, because he was declared indigent by the court last year.

"Not everything he says is true, not everything he says is false," says Biella Coleman, a professor of anthropology at McGill University who has come to know Auernheimer through her research on trolls and hackers. "That's what makes it so difficult and disorienting to talk to him." Auernheimer deploys a peculiar rhetorical strategy that he's learned to work to his advantage: he peppers his conversation with bizarre but true facts and historical references—he has an encyclopedic knowledge of ancient Greek history, world religions and contemporary U.S. anti-government extremists, among other things—then hits you with dubious details about his own life. The idea is that the overwhelming strangeness of the world will make you more receptive to the relatively banal stuff Auernheimer makes up about himself.

"He's an ethnographer of the extreme," Coleman says. "He takes really unusual extreme stories that are out there—and then he'll talk about his children, which he says he's shipped off to South America, but which I don't believe it at all. But it all fits in so well together and wouldn't work if a lot of the stories he told weren't true."

Take, for example, Auernheimer's aforementioned conversion to Mormonism. He told me he'd been a Lutheran, but had joined the LDS earlier this year, after he'd moved to San Francisco for a spell. Auernheimer has been heavy into religion for years, ever since he dubbed himself the "iProphet" and began delivering a series of rambling YouTube "*sermons*" in 2009 that combined Biblical teachings, blatant anti-Semitism and paranoid anti-government ramblings into a dark prism that somehow reflected all the internet's nasty corners at once. "I consider the growth of my beard an extra way to honor my Lord, per Leviticus 19:27," he once *tweeted*.

Auernheimer said he joined a ward in the San Francisco Stake of the Church of Latter Day Saints witnessing a powerful speech by the patriarch. The speech was about the power of anonymity: how Mormon missionaries who arrive, anonymous, in a strange new town have the freedom to say and do things they wouldn't if bound by the social bonds of everyday life. Auernheimer, who has come of age in a hacker community where identity is fluid and friends are often only known by chatroom nicknames, was touched.

"It got me to read the Book of Mormon," he says. "Everything that I mourn about America's decline is distilled in the Book of Nephi. I actually cried the first time I read it." He claims he got baptized in May, began going to church and even dated a Mormon woman. But what faithful Mormon would allow someone to buy him a couple of screwdrivers with grenadine, Auernheimer's odd drink of choice, as I did when I first met him?

"After coming back to New York, I got here and sort of fell off the wagon," he admitted. I guess it could be true.

"Not everything he says is true, not everything he says is false. That's what makes it so difficult and disorienting to talk to him."





When the conductor announced the PATH to Newark was delayed the morning of his pre-trial hearing because of a suspicious package down the line, Auernheimer did not react in a particularly Mormon fashion. "Better be a fucking nuke for them to close the PATH on my trial day," Auernheimer said. "I bet the Feds planted it."

I suggested taking a cab to the courthouse, but Auernheimer probably couldn't have afforded a pricey ride to Newark. Instead he called up a friend, an accountant named Nick who acts sort of a fixer for New York City hackers and programmers. Twenty minutes later, a bald man in his mid-30s was waiting for us in a car at the curb just outside the Lincoln Tunnel. He was wearing a suit, and he fumed like a father whose kid is running late for first day of school.

"This is fucking ridiculous," Nick said when Auernheimer told him we had less than 25 minutes to get to Newark. He began driving with a kind of terrifying precision I've only ever seen in Jason Bourne films. He calmly chatted with Auernheimer in the back seat while guiding us around cars at 90 miles per hour. Nick said he'd once wanted to be a police officer with the LAPD, which is how he learned to drive.

"You picked the worst fucking possible day to do this," Nick said as we sped towards the courthouse. "Did you hear about what happened with the van last night?"

Auernheimer hadn't heard about the van.

"Did you hear about the plane?" Auernheimer hadn't heard about that either.

Nick began to tell a complicated tale of fucked-up transportation logistics. One of their mutual friends, a tech guy, had access to a private plane somehow. But the previous night he'd overestimated the plane's capacity and screwed up what had promised to be an interesting flight.

"He thought he could put eight bitches on the plane, but according to weights and measures he could only do six," Nick said. The flight was grounded. We never learned what had happened to the van.

In spite, or maybe because of, his online notoriety, Auernheimer is good at making real-life friends like Nick with the Buick, and the guy with the private jet—people who can help him out. In person, he exudes a downhome country charm that is so disarming you may not realize he's been expounding very loudly about Jewish-controlled banks and armed revolution against the U.S. government—that is, until the people in the Starbucks around you start flashing you dirty looks. Auernheimer has found a strong support network in New York, comprised of a colorful group of geeks, bohemian hackers and artists who have helped to keep him off the streets by giving him odd programming jobs and letting him crash on their couches. There is some overlap with Occupy Wall Street, which Auernheimer was involved with briefly, during its height last fall. Auernheimer refers to his New York friends as the only family he has. They clearly adore him for all his peculiarities.

"On the one hand he can do and say some really appalling things just for the sake of attention," says Meredith L. Patterson, a respected **computer scientist and developer**. "But on the other hand when he's dealing with somebody who he thinks is genuine and not hypocritical, he's respectful and genuine towards them." Patterson recalls how Auernheimer comforted her after a guy "decided to get all grabby" at a hacker conference this past August in Las Vegas. "Of all the people in the world, Weev was genuinely sympathetic and supportive," she says.

Auernheimer has to depend on the kindness of strangers because he has found it next to impossible to hold a steady job since his arrest.

"When you show up for a job interview and the CEO hates you already it's very difficult to gain employment," he says. Instead, he had decided to freelance. "From now on, I'm going to work for

free for my friends and see where God's will takes me," he said. "I work a lot more, and it's almost like I get more out of it [if I'm] not trying to make a dollar."

A substantial amount of material support has also come from women. Auernheimer's an unlikely ladies' man, a geek Casanova in the Julian Assange [tradition](#). While talking with him I often lost track of which of the many girlfriends he was talking about.

"My saving grace is that I know how to stick my dick in the right place. A couple of them wrote me checks and that's how we're funding my defense," he says. One recent ex had access to her dad's private jet, and the two would fly to exotic locales in India and the South Pacific, he claims.

"He does have the ability to nab women," says Coleman. "He's had some fairly wild girlfriend configurations."

Auernheimer has been under strict bail conditions since his arrest, which for a while included a ban on using the internet except related to employment. But he'd found a forced internet sabbatical refreshing after years of virtual living.

"I started smoking cigarettes, and I drank at bars and picked up women," he says. He improved his welding skills and believes he is more prepared for the stint in prison he had expected even before the verdict was handed down. "I've sharpened many of the tools in my toolkit. My rhetoric has improved. Solely by the number of women I've seduced, this sharpened it."

Thanks to Nick's driving, we miraculously arrived at the courthouse for the hearing with eight minutes to spare. As we walked to the courtroom, Auernheimer complained about the Honorable Susan D. Wignenton, the judge who would oversee his trial, and one of many aspects of his case that he believed to be stacked against him. "She's a mean bitch, I hear." Auernheimer said. "I can see it in her eyes, she's a black Baptist Bush appointee and I don't think she's a fan of the GNAA."

The first three facts are definitely true, and the last one probably is too. GNAA stands for the "Gay Niggers Association of America." The GNAA, which takes its name from a cult satirical 1992 Danish film *Gayniggers from Outer Space*, is a longstanding internet trolling organization of which Weev is a former president. Goatse Security originated as an offshoot of the GNAA. The group reflects both Auernheimer's outrageous offensiveness, and his sincere belief in trolling as a form of art. He still sounds star-struck when talking about the day he was elected GNAA president.

"The level of dedication applied to causing shit on the internet—it was mind-blowing. I was like, holy shit."

Internet trolling is typically the haphazard pursuit of idiot teenagers who mindlessly rack up outrage with spam or obscenities. But membership in the GNAA is exclusive, and members take pride in pissing people off creatively. Like Auernheimer, they consider themselves artisanal trolls. To become a GNAA member you have to have at least rudimentary programming ability. Prospective members are grilled on trivia questions from the *Gayniggers from Outer Space* film to test their dedication to the cause. "It was the first troll organization with a litmus test to keep dumb people out," Auernheimer says.

The membership requirements seem to have worked. The GNAA has been a durable presence in internet fuckery. During Sandy, the GNAA [fooled conservative blogs](#) (including the Drudge Report) into reporting on fake Twitter accounts that were supposedly being used by black New Yorkers to organize looting. The trolls created fake accounts and tweeted crude boasts of their looting under the hashtag #sandylootcrew, which seemed to confirm conservative's most racist stereotypes of urban African Americans. The GNAA's underlying gag is to enact ludicrous racism and bigotry to bait people into responding in ways that reveal their own biases. But it's far from clear where the GNAA's trolling ends and its actual beliefs begin.

When I asked Auernheimer, who says he's got Jewish ancestors, if he actually means all of the bigoted stuff he says, he replied: "I do think Jews have power in this country and I fight powerful people. Jews in general have power over media and banking. Ergo, I will make fun of them on the internet."

Despite his concerns about the judge, once we were actually in the courtroom Auernheimer seemed completely in his element. He's actually grown to enjoy the courtroom after years of legal battles, which included beating drug charges in 2010, after the FBI claimed they found a veritable illegal pharmacy in his home during a raid related to the iPad investigation. "I like the old mahogany wood, and law is just troll-battling," he said.

In the popular imagination, the hacker is a shabby geek facing down an imposing army of black-suited g-men, and I was surprised to find this is actually how it was in Auernheimer's case. I counted about eight suits in the gallery on the prosecution side, not including the government's lawyers. These appeared to be AT&T's people, sent to make sure everything went smoothly. They leaned back and forth between rows throughout the proceedings, showing each other things they had written on notepads. Auernheimer's three-person defense team was led by Tor Ekeland, a Brooklyn lawyer with a surfer's shaggy mop of hair and laidback demeanor. He had agreed to represent Auernheimer pro-bono after his wife, a photojournalist, met him at Occupy Wall Street.

Auernheimer has spent years fashioning himself into a supremely unsympathetic character, and it's paid off—even if, at times, it's made his legal battles a bit lonely. When he was about to be bailed out after his arrest, Auernheimer couldn't even find a single person in the U.S. willing to attach their name to his case by signing his bail papers. Not even his close friends in the computer security community would risk tying their names to his case.

"Being associated with me can burn bridges," Auernheimer says. "Everybody gets money from the U.S. Government. Literally, we had to fly somebody in to sign papers because nobody else would do it."

That person was the 29-year-old programmer Jeffrey "Sneak" Paul, an American who currently lives in Berlin. Paul is a friend of Auernheimer's and hired him to do programming work for his consulting firm before, in his words, "the government declared that he couldn't work for me any longer because my personal website describes me as a 'hacker.'"

Paul also put up Auernheimer's \$50,000 bail, and single-handedly runs a barebones "Free Weev" website.

"Weev is unique in that his personal brand of inflammatory speech, right or wrong, very clearly illustrates the boundary of who and what you can't criticize in that country," Paul wrote in an email. I asked Paul if he was worried that someone with outstanding identity theft charges like Auernheimer might not abide by his bail conditions. "Weev is an exceptionally honorable person," he wrote back. "There are certain inviolate truths about his conduct that a lot of people don't understand."



A strange thing happened during the few minutes we waited for the judge to arrive in the courtroom. Auernheimer wandered over to the prosecutor's side of the room and began schmoozing with the people trying to put him in prison. He shook hands warmly with the Assistant District Attorney and bantered with AT&T's lawyer, Stephen Knox, a tall man with metal spectacles and white hair who looked like an elongated Colonel Sanders. "You don't look anything like your picture," Knox joked. This bit of chivalry must have made an impression on

Knox. After the hearing, Auernheimer and I ended up in the elevator with Knox, and he seemed determined to prove to Auernheimer he was no square.

"You know, I knew John Perry Barlow," Knox said, name-dropping the Grateful-Dead-songwriter-turned-internet-freedom-activist John Perry Barlow. Barlow and Knox were classmates at Wesleyan back in the '60s. "I know of him," Auernheimer said.

As we waited for the judge to arrive in the courtroom, Auernheimer wandered over to the prosecutor's side of the room and began schmoozing with the people trying to put him in prison.

The hearing itself was short and largely uneventful. The main issue was a fruitless motion by the defense to dismiss the case. During the hearing it was revealed that one of the government's witnesses had been kept confidential until the day before the hearing to protect him from retaliation or intimidation by Auernheimer. The witness was Andrew "Trelane" Kirch, a fellow hacker and longtime adversary of Auernheimer and Goatse Security. He'd provided the FBI with a key part of their case: incriminating chat logs where Auernheimer is shown reveling in the iPad breach and eagerly organizing its promotion.

I later asked Auernheimer if Kirch had reason to be afraid of him. Auernheimer, after all, boasted to the *New York Times* that "I make people afraid for their lives." He made good on this boast when he helped hound the blogger [Kathy Sierra](#) off of the internet in 2007 with an epic campaign of harassment that remains a legend among trolls. But Auernheimer said he'd known Kirch had turned over the logs for months and hadn't done a thing. "I don't have enemies other than the federal government," he said. "I have never attacked anyone on a personal grudge. There is always a compelling or social philosophical reason."

This has been the single principle that Auernheimer has carried throughout his varied career: That his trolling is Good For Society, and that he is doing us all a favor by acting like a dick on the internet. Earlier this year he

appeared on the Australian current affairs TV show *Insight* and offered what amounts to a social Darwinian argument for internet trolling.

I think the problem with our society is that everybody is so politically correct because they've grown up in a bubble of Fischer Price rounded corners and bright colors where costumed animals tell nobody anything that might hurt their feelings. Kids these days, they should be out welding, they should work with caustic chemicals, throw spears, you know, learn to be real people in the real world and not these insulated morons who can't hear anything that will hurt their feelings.

It was supposed to be edgy but ended up sounding outdated, like a George Carlin riff from back when he was an angry beat.

After the hearing ended, Auernheimer's defense team stuck around the empty courtroom to figure out the projector system. As Ekeland was fiddling around with the setup I asked the other two lawyers if they had ever seen Goatse, the [legendary gross-out meme](#) that is Goatse Security's namesake. There was an awkward pause.

"The gaping asshole?" one finally said. "Yeah, I've seen it."

"I looked it up," said the other. "Unfortunately in the office." This clearly pleased Auernheimer. He'd managed to troll his own lawyers. We all laughed until Ekeland pointed out that everything we said was probably being recorded. We left pretty quickly after that.

Walking out of the courtroom, I asked Auernheimer if he expected any of his family to attend the trial. "My parents disowned me the first time the Secret Service showed at my house," he said.

It was a good story, but Auernheimer's mother, Alyse Auernheimer, told me a different one when I called her a few days later. She was initially reluctant to talk about Auernheimer when I reached her in Richmond, Virginia, where she now lives with her husband and works as a real estate agent. Alyse said she hasn't spoken to Andrew in six years and though she was aware of his case didn't know it was about to go to trial. "I couldn't even tell you where he is," she said. I told her I'd just spent the day with him in New Jersey. "I'm happy to hear that he's safe and that's about the best that I can hope for."

Alyse disputed Andrew's account of the break in their relationship. ("The police never showed up at our door.") According to Alyse, Andrew had been the one who inexplicably cut off all communication with her and her husband—in the Christmas of 2006, just before he turned 21. Growing up, Auernheimer had been an unusually bright kid with a few quirks and a love of computers. He enrolled at James Madison University when he was just 14 but dropped out after two years. Throughout it all, Alyse said, "we had a really great relationship."

Things started to change around 2004. Andrew moved to California and stopped calling or returning their emails. "We didn't have any address, we didn't have a phone number," Alyse said. She believes that's when Andrew got into drugs, which he's been **vocal about enjoying**. But even though her son had practically vanished, she got a disturbing glimpse into his world one day in 2009. She had Googled her college-aged daughter's name to try to find some photos from a robotics competition she'd entered. Instead, she discovered a link to a hacker messageboard where Andrew was being vehemently attacked. Some rival hackers had "doxed" him, posting a detailed dossier of his family, including their home address and the name of the college his sister attended.

"I was horrified, as you can well imagine," Alyse said. "It was a very sad moment and I just kind of put my head in my hands and wept for an hour about it."

Alyse discovered through these posts also that he had also been **connected in a news report** to threatening phone calls against a Portland synagogue. (Andrew said he's never threatened a synagogue and the story was a smear against him by the FBI. After interviewing him, authorities determined he was "a much lower-level threat than was believed previously" and blamed a different man for the calls.)

Alyse told me she and her husband have always been eager to help Andrew in any way they could if he would just "cut the bullshit" and go back to school, or find a positive path in life. She told me to deliver a message to Andrew: "One thing I want him to know is we're not hunting you down, Andrew. Be who you need to be. Just be productive. If we can develop a relationship, that's OK too. That's all we can ask."

Auernheimer's trial didn't start until Nov. 13 after being delayed for more than a week because of Hurricane Sandy. He spent most of the week after the storm helping to bail out a friend's flooded datacenter in Lower Manhattan. And even in the midst of the chaos he managed to get himself featured in an **Associated Press** article about the storm, claiming to be the owner of the datacenter.

"There's water dripping through the roof, and it's a Starbucks," he told the AP, "If it collapses, we're all dead." When asked during his testimony what his occupation was, he replied, "I do disaster response part-time."

At the heart of the trial was whether what Auernheimer had done was criminal hacking or simply exposing a security failure by AT&T. Auernheimer testified that he'd publicized the breach because, "I think the consumer has a right to be informed when they're put at risk by a company. And we have not only a right as Americans to analyze things that corporations publish and make publicly accessible, but perhaps even a moral obligation to tell people."

But in the cross-examination Assistant District Attorney Zach Inrater grilled him over emails he had sent to journalists in June 2010, after the AT&T breach that suggested less-than-pure motives. He had written then: "I would be absolutely happy to describe the method of theft in more detail." Here, Auernheimer was apparently copping to a crime in stealing tens of thousands of emails.

Auernheimer responded with the classic defense of the internet troll: He was just trolling.

"I was trying to sensationalize the story," Auernheimer said. "It was hyperbole... if I say: Hey, bro, can I steal that cigarette? And I grab one, it's not really theft, you know." This logic was truly Weevian. According to Auernheimer, he wanted everyone in the world to think he was behind the data theft of the century, while knowing in his heart it was just a minor hiccup not worth a fuss. This is the opposite of what a rational person would do, which is why I believe it's true in Auernheimer's case.

But Intrater's incredulousness bleeds through the transcript. Auernheimer's constant shape-shifting, from cartoonish villain to high-minded man of principles, may have helped him win fame on the internet, but it proved a fatal liability in the courtroom.

Intrater: Everything is hyperbolized to the extreme; right?

Auernheimer: Yes.

Intrater: But not here, not today; right?

Auernheimer: I mean, no, not today, this is not the time or the place for hyperbole.

Intrater: You wouldn't hyperbolize today; right?

Auernheimer: That's correct.

Intrater: Because you're under indictment today, right? You're trying to convince the jury.

Auernheimer: It's not about convincing, it's about telling the truth.

In the end, Auernheimer didn't convince the jury. After just a few hours of deliberation they delivered a guilty verdict on both of his charges on Tuesday, Nov. 20. Sentencing is scheduled for early next year. Weev is going to prison.

It's hard to be sympathetic to Auernheimer's plight, as charming as I found him to be in person, and as much as I feel for people like Meredith Patterson who are going to lose a good friend. Auernheimer has [compared himself on his blog](#) to the Norse trickster god Loki, "the greatest engineer of myth." So he must also know that Loki's mischief [ends](#) with him hogtied by his own son's entrails and a poisonous snake hanging above him, dripping venom onto his face for all of eternity. Auernheimer purports to be carrying out sociological experiments with his trolling, but there comes a point where nobody can be as consistently, vocally bigoted as he has been and not actually be considered a bigot. There is an Auernheimer that exists independently of his ability to get a rise out of people, and if anything, his conviction shows that it is never solely up to the troll to determine whether something is "just trolling." And it shouldn't be.

But then there will always be terrible people, and out of all of the terrible people on the internet Auernheimer is one of the best. The pureness of his awfulness-for-awfulness' sake is something to marvel at. When the law came for him he didn't suddenly pretend to see the light, he doubled-down and sent a sprawling, arrogant email to the Assistant DA [signed](#) "hugs and courage to you". Auernheimer can be a bully and a racist but [like many trolls](#) he exposes hypocrisies and injustices through his provocation. In his case, he has forced us to put up or shut up when it comes to freedom of speech on the internet.

Because in the end, Auernheimer's case is about free speech. He faces ten years in prison for using information accidentally made publicly available by AT&T to embarrass it. Nothing was harmed but a giant corporation's reputation. (Auernheimer and Spitler destroyed the emails after contacting Gawker.) No doubt the fact that he was a dick about it—that he has made a *career* of being a dick about it—has a lot to do with the fact he's going to prison. But if being a dick on the internet was a crime we'd all be headed for the electric chair. Auernheimer plans to appeal his conviction, and when he does it will hopefully help clear up the U.S.'s outdated and vague computer crime laws, which lead to ridiculous penalties like his. People like Auernheimer should continue to expose security flaws in the companies we put increasingly more trust in.

But Auernheimer is not a martyr being "crucified," as he likes to say. He's a troll who finally went too far in his search for another soft spot to poke at. In fact I think that Auernheimer believes that going to prison will prove to be his biggest troll yet. Just minutes after his conviction, hundreds of tweets rang out with the #freeweew hashtag, more in a few minutes than in the many months since he's been arrested, an echo of the flurry of the initial hack. Auernheimer told

me he is already planning a computer program that will allow him to use the inmate email system to post to Twitter.

"I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing," he told me. "I can say that my greatest works of art will come from a prison cell."

All photos by Tamara Mann, Courtesy [Ohinternet.com](#). Top image by Jim Cooke.

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He sounds like a sociopath - no conscience, no inner moral compass, no empathy, no ability to sound like the jury was wrong about the technical details of the case. A person can't steal publicly available information if it would be like CBS

In a better world, he'd be spending the rest of his days claiming someone stole programming that they broadcast over the air. The party that fucked up

As for this world, I hope he likes federal prison.

here was AT&T

If he goes in general pop, he'll be just fine. He'll fit in well in the prison hierarchy and I'm sure they'll be using his hacking skills and will see to it that he's taken care of and lives as well as you can in a penitentiary.

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If they put him in a supermax, he'll be fucked.

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Nobody to lie to and manipulate, alone only with his head in a brick wall. How long will this guy

goes through in a month? A hundred? A thousand?

I almost feel sorry for him.

Almost.

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oh so this was the asshole behind the attacks on Kathy Sierra? Sorry, no fucks to give for his trial and sentence. The internet is already an unfriendly place for women who dare to be outspoken in "territories" that some of these self identified geeks claim as their own.



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like this man making sexual threats and treating women like garbage that deter many from getting involved. New York is a shame to have had him because FREE SPEECH? What about Sierra's

fantastic reads. That said, I rarely find myself sympathizing with any of the subjects of these long form pieces.

free speech? Did he think of that?



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Since I had to think about things a bit, it's likely no one will read this. Oh, well. Nevertheless, here I go.

I can't stand this guy, but I agree with him on this: "I contend there is no crime in telling the truth or using AT&T's, or anybody's, publicly accessible data, to cite it to talk about how they made

I agree with the jury. The argument that something that is publicly available can't be stolen is really a kind of silly argument. It's like forgetting to bring your suitcase on that partridge if you come home from the airport and then hearing the person who stole it say, "I'm sorry, you can't have it back!" It's on you.

No, it wasn't, and, no, it isn't. Any judge and jury in the land would find it reasonable for a person like Auernheimer to know the difference between publicly posted information and leaving the answers to the test she is giving on the blackboard in front of the

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